United Nations A/C.3/52/SR.6

General Assembly
Fifty-second session

Official Records

Distr.: General
5 February 1998
English
Original: French

Third Committee

Summary record of the 6th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 17 October 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Busacca ..... (Italy)

Contents

Agenda item 102: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

97-82126 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 102: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (A/52/3 and A/52/56, A/52/57-E/1997/4, A/52/60-E/1997/76, A/52/80-E/1997/14, A/52/183, A/52/328 and A/52/351; A/C.3/42/L.2 and L.3; E/1997/103 and 104) (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Saleh** (Bahrain) said that when one talked about social development one was talking about individual development, and that social development encompassed all partners in society without distinction. Bahrain had made great efforts to enable all citizens and all residents to receive free education and free health services; it had also focused particularly on young people, who were society's mainstay and on whom the future depended. In that respect, his delegation welcomed the offer of the Portuguese Government to host the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in August 1998.

2. Older persons and persons with disabilities had a special place in society; the State recognized that they had every right to lead normal, decent lives and endeavoured to ensure that they did. Bahrain did not have the problems in respect of older persons that other countries had because under the precepts of Islam, they were afforded great consideration by all members of society as old people were regarded as wise and dignified. Nevertheless, Bahrain was making great efforts to provide older persons with every legislative and legal safeguard, in accordance with the provisions of article 5, paragraph (b) of the Constitution. Before the adoption of the social security law for older persons the national commission responsible for older persons had cooperated with the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs and other national bodies to celebrate the International Day of Older Persons, and many Arab forums, the League of Arab States and 15 other countries had cooperated in that connection with the Executive Office of the Council of Ministers of Employment and Social Affairs. In parallel with the Day, Bahrain had organized a seminar to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the World Assembly on Ageing held in Vienna in 1982 in application of General Assembly resolutions 33/52 and 35/129.

3. Major progress had been made for persons with disabilities since the needed services had been put in place. The Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs had acted to promote the social rehabilitation of persons with disabilities by providing the prostheses, services and facilities they needed, while the Ministry of Health had set up disability prevention services and prepared both a publicity and awareness-raising programme and an early diagnosis programme to detect the problems that often led to disabilities.

4. **Mr. Nikifolov** (Russian Federation) said that countries' internal social problems could spill over national borders and impede humankind's march towards progress, and that the decisions taken at the World Summit for Social Development should therefore be implemented.

5. The goal of the Federal Programme of Social Reforms for 1996-2000 and the various programmes which the Russian Federation had adopted on youth, children, older persons and the family was to improve the material situation and living conditions of the population; safeguard employment and enhance the skills of the labour force in order to make it more competitive; safeguard citizens' constitutional rights in the areas of employment, social protection, education, health, culture and housing; base social policy on the family; normalize and then improve the demographic situation; reduce the mortality rate — in particular amongst children and the active population — and improve the social infrastructure. The Russian Federation also wanted to eliminate mass unemployment and help the disadvantaged layers of society, particularly the various categories of migrants. To that end, better use must be made of the resources the Government spent on the social sector, and extrabudgetary resources must be obtained to finance those activities.

6. While the primary responsibility for making the necessary socio-economic transformations lay with the transitional economies themselves, that did not make it any less necessary for the international community and, first and foremost the United Nations — whose mission it was to promote social development — to support their efforts.

7. In that connection, the Russian Federation believed that full advantage had not been taken of the opportunities for system-wide coordination in respect of the decisions taken at the World Summit for Social Development. The Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions, and the Commission for Social Development in particular, could develop and apply practical measures to implement the recommendations of the Copenhagen Summit. The Russian Federation supported the efforts to strengthen the role of the Commission for Social Development; reinforcing its authority would necessarily increase the effectiveness of its work, while ensuring closer monitoring of the implementation of earlier decisions.

8. The specialized agencies should, for their part, develop and carry out specific programmes of assistance for countries on the basis of their national action plans in the

social area. The regional organizations could also help to solve the problems of social development by coordinating their activities with those of the relevant United Nations bodies. Given the scale of the problems that needed to be solved it was essential for the Secretariat to further improve the effectiveness of its work.

9. The Russian Federation was fully prepared to cooperate to an even greater degree with countries so that the United Nations give social affairs priority attention.

10. **Ms. Foo** (Singapore), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that, while the responsibility for social development lay primarily with Governments, international and regional cooperation was also needed in order to accelerate economic growth, foster social progress and cultural development in the region, and promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in respect of economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative issues of interest to all. Thanks to that integrated approach, the vast national programmes and the regional and international cooperation existing among the members of ASEAN, the peoples of the region had seen a considerable improvement in their quality of life.

11. Social development would continue to be an essential ingredient for political stability and economic growth, and vice versa. Despite significant progress, certain sectors remained disadvantaged and poverty continued to prevail in certain member States, slowing their progress on the road to social development. In an attempt to overcome those problems, ASEAN had drawn up a plan of action on social development (1994-1998), which was in line with United Nations programmes and the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, in order to strengthen regional cooperation and improve quality of life in member countries.

12. Various programmes, strategies and national action plans had served as the basis for the declaration of principles aimed at strengthening cooperation among States members of ASEAN in respect of young people, a group which was growing more rapidly than the rest of the population. The four major goals of the declaration were to: (a) improve the quality of education provided to young people in the ASEAN countries; (b) create increased employment opportunities and fight against the "desocialization" of young people; (c) promote positive and constructive attitudes among young people towards progress and the global challenges of modernization; and (d) prepare the young people of the region for the leading role that ASEAN would play in the future.

13. Other activities devoted to young people included an annual day for youth, celebrated on 8 August every year since 1992; exchanges of information on the involvement of young people in protecting the environment; and in-service training programmes. Preparation was currently under way for the second ASEAN ministerial meeting on youth, to be held in Kuala Lumpur on 17 and 18 November 1997.

14. Aware of the importance of regional and worldwide programmes in strengthening national capacities, ASEAN fully endorsed the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

15. As for the issue of older persons, she said that the ageing of the population was becoming a worldwide phenomenon of paramount importance owing to the fact that the birth rate was decreasing whereas life expectancy was increasing, which gave rise to numerous problems regarding housing, leisure and health. ASEAN attached great importance to older persons, and had elaborated a work programme on care for older persons living in communities, which was the main project of the ASEAN Committee on Social Development and of the latter's subcommittee on health and nutrition. ASEAN and the United Nations Development Programme had organized a seminar on the evaluation of the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities and available resources (Bangkok, 5-7 August 1997).

16. The countries of ASEAN welcomed the decision to observe, in 1999, the International Year of Older Persons, the theme which had been adopted, and the work of the ad hoc informal open-ended support group established for the occasion. They also appreciated the contribution of the representatives of the Dominican Republic and Spain, who had greatly advanced the work of the support group by putting forward a detailed programme for the preparation, launching and follow-up of the Year.

17. Old age often added to the difficulties experienced by persons with disabilities, and it had become clear that ageing and disability could not be considered separately. ASEAN therefore associated itself with the Long-term Strategy to Implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons to the Year 2000 and Beyond, approved in General Assembly resolution 49/153. She emphasized the importance of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and of the decision of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to declare an Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002).

18. The family was a very important issue for the countries of ASEAN, since it determined not only the moral and social aspirations of society, but also its economic health. However, economic development had often disrupted the family unit. ASEAN, which supported the goals of the International Year of the Family, had created joint projects for strengthening the family.

19. In conclusion, she said that national and regional initiatives should be complemented by increased international cooperation in order to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries. ASEAN supported the action of the United Nations to integrate various social development policies into the global development policy of the international community.

20. **Mr. Al-Sudairy** (Saudi Arabia) said that his Government was making energetic efforts to promote social development. The fundamental law on Government, based on the Shariah, called for consultation and the adoption of laws and regulations which were equitable for all, particularly in respect of the right to work and the right to freedom of movement. As for social security, the State assisted anyone who encountered social or economic problems which they could not overcome, in order to prevent any deviation and to enable the persons concerned to take care of their own needs. In particular, it encouraged families to take care of orphans, supported programmes created to provide financial and material help for persons with disabilities living with their families, gave assistance to charitable associations, and had created, *inter alia*, child care centres, centres for the professional rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, centres for paralysed children, and centres for children needing special care.

21. The objective of the social security system in Saudi Arabia, created in 1962, was to improve the living conditions of several groups of people by providing pensions for older persons, orphans, widows and divorced persons and various types of assistance for families of prisoners and for victims of accidents. In 1996, the total amount of those benefits had been 2,690 million riyals.

22. In addition to the State authorities, Saudi Arabia possessed a network of charitable associations which based their activities on the teachings of Islam. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs encouraged such associations, which acted at the local level, and paid them approximately 47 million riyals per year. One of the most dynamic of those associations took care of children with disabilities. Over a period of more than 10 years, it had enabled a considerable number of children to attend school normally or to follow rehabilitation courses at centres created for the purpose. In 1993, it had even organized a world conference attended by 400 experts from all over the world, who had exchanged information on their experiences and drafted recommendations on care for persons with disabilities. On that subject, the Labour Code required that at least 2 per cent of the employees of enterprises with 50 or more employees should be persons with disabilities, unless the nature of the company's work prevented it.

23. Saudi Arabia was on the way to attaining the goals set out in the Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, while preserving the religious and moral values of Shariah; its goal was to encourage individuals to be responsible and to serve society.

24. The duty to help developing countries was set out in the Islamic Constitution of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which advocated solidarity, justice and security for all peoples. In that spirit, Saudi Arabia had spent approximately 240 thousand million riyals on various projects benefiting about 70 developing countries throughout the world.

25. **Ms. Patterson** (Australia) said that preparations to celebrate the International Year of Older Persons in Australia were already under way and would provide an opportunity for the whole community, including professional organizations, private and public enterprise and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to be involved in efforts on behalf of that section of the population. Against the backdrop of a society that was ageing relatively rapidly, Australia had developed a comprehensive framework for service delivery to older people, managed by all levels of government, the public, private and charitable sectors and various NGOs. In addition, various social and fiscal measures had been taken to fund quality care for older people living in residential facilities and to ensure financial sustainability into the future.

26. The International Year of Older Persons would help to promote more positive images of older persons and to foster the development of appropriate support for more active older people. A nationally coordinated approach was planned, to ensure that long-term objectives were achieved.

27. She had been appointed as contact person with the United Nations, in her capacity as Chairman of the Conference for Older Australians, an advisory group established by the Government to advise it on its involvement in the International Year of Older Persons, to devise strategies for promoting positive images of older people and to provide the Government with advice on ageing. The members of the Conference represented a broad spectrum of interests, including health, financial planning, education, business, recreation and the arts, tourism and the

environment, public life and community services. Further information about the Conference could be obtained through its Internet home page (http://www.health.gov.au/coa).

28. The combined work of the Conference for Older Australians, the Healthy Ageing Task Force (established to coordinate the activities of the state and Commonwealth authorities) and the Australian Coalition '99 (a national network of NGOs) offered a unique opportunity to achieve long-term objectives.

29. Some of the key outcomes to be sought from the year were: a nationally coordinated approach to the celebration of the International Year for Older Persons; improved community attitudes of older people and ageing; inter-generational linkages; and long-term benefits for older people through policies and programmes, adopted by the Government, business, public enterprises, professional organizations and non-governmental organizations, which were more responsive to the needs of older people.

30. **Mr. Hassan** (Pakistan) said that social development must be based on economic growth and sustainable development. Without economic development, there could be no infrastructure development, employment generation or social integration. The increasing disparity between the world's richest and poorest people did not augur well for improving the world social situation. The findings of the UNDP *Human Development Report 1997* and the *World Economic and Social Survey 1997* offered little cause for optimism.

31. The developed countries must, without further delay, fulfil their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their GDP to Official Development Assistance for developing countries, thereby helping those countries to achieve economic expansion and employment generation and to become integrated in the global economy. Meanwhile, the United Nations must explore ways of addressing debt issues, making structural adjustment programmes more socially sensitive and promoting development aid as a vehicle for investment and development support. That would help create an enabling environment for improving the social situation in developing countries.

32. The United Nations system, Governments, NGOs and other actors of civil society must join forces in order to formulate policies, strategies and programmes of action to face the challenge posed by rapid population ageing in the developing countries and a high proportion of older persons in the developed countries.

33. In poor countries, the enormous potential of young people, the most important and productive segment of the population, was given to waste as a result of unemployment, drugs, social seclusion and illiteracy. Governments, with the help of the United Nations, must ensure implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, so that young people were able to benefit from national development strategies. Pakistan had established a Ministry of Youth Affairs to coordinate all development schemes for young people. A Youth Investment Promotion Scheme had also been launched recently to enable young people to set up their own businesses by providing them with credit at preferential rates.

34. Women were another important section of the population. They played a pivotal role in the development and consolidation of families, but were among the most vulnerable groups in society. National programmes must give priority to providing them with income security and proper health coverage. To that end, the Government had established a Ministry of Women's Development, which coordinated all programmes implemented in that area.

35. Pakistan recognized the importance of the family in the consolidation of communities and social development. It therefore fully endorsed the objectives of the follow-up to the International Year of the Family. It had already acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

36. Disabled persons were one of the most neglected segments of the population and deserved special attention from national Governments and the international community. Programmes must be formulated to ensure effective measures for the prevention of disability and the rehabilitation of disabled persons with the goal of involving them fully in national life. Pakistan had established a Ministry of Special Education and Health, which formulated, coordinated and implemented various programmes of action, in cooperation with NGOs, for the rehabilitation and social integration of disabled persons, with special emphasis on disabled children.

37. Since resource constraints remained the major obstacle to developing countries' social development, the United Nations must provide financial and technical assistance to those countries to support their national efforts.

38. **Mr. Said** (Malaysia) said that the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development, which had addressed three interrelated issues, namely, poverty eradication, employment and social cohesion, remained far from being implemented, despite the thorough review undertaken in 1996.

39. Urbanization and development had put considerable pressure on and brought about changes in the traditional family unit, thereby heightening social problems. In the context of social development, the institution of the family must be strengthened to enable it to withstand the pressures of rapid modernization and to produce responsible citizens. To that end, Malaysia had continued to implement its family development programme in cooperation with civil society, including NGOs and the business and academic sectors.

40. The development of young people's potential was vital to the success of the country's socio-economic development. Despite the fact that children and young people constituted the majority of the world's population, their views were not always taken into account. Acknowledging the critical importance of children and young people, Malaysia had focused, at the national level, on providing young people with training in various fields, increasing their participation in sports and cultural activities, developing their leadership qualities and giving them the necessary skills to contribute to nation-building. Changes in value systems and lifestyles, particularly in major urban areas, and the development of information technology would also require a reorientation of youth development policies and programmes. Young people needed to be not only scientifically and technologically equipped, but also imbued with sound ethical values in order to meet those challenges.

41. Malaysia believed that the observance of the International Year of Older Persons with the theme "Towards a Society for All Ages" was timely, since the Copenhagen Programme of Action had called for specific efforts to be made to protect older persons, including those with disabilities. Since ageing was a lifelong process, preparing the entire population for it was an integral part of Malaysia's social and economic development policies. In that regard, steps had been taken to ensure that family ties were maintained and that caring for the elderly continued to be a family responsibility.

42. Malaysia was fully engaged at the national, regional and international levels in promoting the full participation and equality of people with disabilities in society. It was continuing its efforts to provide education, training and rehabilitation for the disabled, including special education programmes and programmes to enable the disabled to gain economic independence.

43. Malaysia welcomed the contribution of non-governmental organizations in providing social services to complement those provided by the State.

44. **Mr. Simon-Padros** (Argentina) said that the Secretariat for Social Development was the body responsible for dealing with social issues, including poverty eradication, in Argentina. In order to provide guidance on the management of those issues, a Federal Social Development Council had been set up within the Secretariat, comprising representatives from the ministries of social affairs of the country's 24 provinces. Programmes were focused mainly on assisting the family and the community and on strengthening local authorities, which were being called upon to play a new role as a result of constitutional reforms guaranteeing equality of opportunity and treatment, particularly for older people, children, women and the disabled.

45. In that context, the country had launched a National Plan for Older People, 1996-2000, which provided food aid and assistance with clothing, housing, health, transport, recreation, education and social integration. Since all aspects of ageing were interlinked, the focus should be not only on coordinating activities but also on striking a balance between the role of the family, the State and all those who helped meet the needs of that growing segment of the population.

46. Argentina's economic and social policies accorded particular importance to employment, with full employment as their goal. Special projects were being implemented in favour of the most vulnerable workers, particularly young people, women and the disabled.

47. Several laws, including that ratifying International Labour Convention No. 159, dealt with vocational rehabilitation of the disabled. Several institutions had also signed a charter aimed at ensuring the vocational rehabilitation of disabled persons and at enabling them to engage in income-generating activities.

48. Argentina had several programmes for children and young people, including the national food programme, which aimed to turn school cafeterias into development centres for children, the programme of assistance for minors living in exceptionally difficult circumstances, the youth development programme, which focused mainly on socially vulnerable young people, and the programme for the strengthening of civil society, which sought to apply a balanced social policy to ensure the well-being of vulnerable sectors of society. Greater resources and efforts were needed to ensure that social programmes effectively benefited their target populations. In that regard, an integrated social plan whereby the State would continue to invest in people was to be drawn up in 1998.

49. **Mr. Sharma** (India) said that full employment and social integration were central to the questions of ageing, the disabled, young people and the family. Youth unemployment, crime and even politically motivated

violence were linked. Actions in support of productive employment and sustainable livelihoods had a favourable impact on social integration and, to the extent that they stimulated trade in border areas, even on regional cooperation.

50. As the number of older people grew, the problems associated with ageing populations had come to command greater attention in India. An expert group was currently working on a National Policy for Older Persons, which would focus on productive ageing, health care, housing, income security and institutional care for the elderly. Some problems characteristic of developing countries like India (concentration of older persons in rural areas, dependence on agriculture, illiteracy) would also be taken into account.

51. At the international level, the operational framework for the International Year of Older Persons, 1999 could serve as an occasion for developing a long-term plan on ageing. In developing countries faced with immediate economic problems, the needs of the elderly, the disabled and other marginalized people had often been neglected in planning, while scarce resources were invested elsewhere, where the need or the cost benefits were perceived to be greater.

52. In recent years, India had taken a number of steps which reflected heightened priority for disability issues. The Government had prescribed a standard set of definitions, along with standard tests, for the purposes of certifying disability. A technology development project had been established to provide suitable, cost-effective prostheses to improve the mobility, employment opportunities and integration of disabled persons. Such technology had brought relief to handicapped people in many parts of the world, and especially to the victims of landmines in South Asia.

53. **Mr. Al-Humaimidi** (Iraq) said that, like all developing countries, Iraq accorded great importance to social development. However, it also had to contend with other burdens resulting from the economic embargo imposed upon it for over seven years.

54. The principal objectives of Iraq's social development strategy were to meet the basic needs of the population, to increase per capita income and to share national revenues equitably between social and economic development. The State had therefore focused on housing, health and education. It had built 131 hospitals, 851 health centres offering free health care and medicines to mothers and children, 8,917 primary schools and 2,719 secondary schools. Moreover, it had provided for older persons and the disabled and accorded special attention to the family, children and women's participation in working life.

55. The economic embargo against Iraq had seriously undermined the implementation of that strategy, insofar as any development process depended on three key elements: financial resources, international cooperation and the political will of the State concerned. Iraq financed its development with oil revenues. However, the economic sanctions imposed on it since August 1990 prevented it from exporting its oil and from using the funds which it held abroad. Moreover, the countries which insisted on maintaining the sanctions were putting pressure on other countries and prohibiting them from cooperating with Iraq. In those circumstances, a State's political will, no matter how great, could not advance the development process on its own.

56. One of the main goals of social development was health for all. The embargo had had disastrous consequences in that area, as reflected in the number of persons over 50 years of age who had died in July 1997 owing to high blood pressure (409) or diabetes (224). The corresponding figures had been 122 in July 1989 and 62 in July 1987. In addition, persons with disabilities suffered from the shortage of medicines and the deterioration in the quality of services, which slowed their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The embargo had also had repercussions on the labour market due to the fall in the number of projects in all areas of activity. Its effects had also been felt in the education sector, as reflected in the high school drop-out rate, owing in part to parents who encouraged their children to abandon their studies for economic reasons. Women had to do non-productive jobs in order to satisfy the needs of their families, and that was to the detriment of their social activities, which led to a decline in their role in society.

57. The difficult situation being experienced by the Iraqi people because of the economic sanctions had given rise to many reactions within the United Nations system. As an example, he quoted paragraph 14 of annex II to document A/51/L.78.

58. The right to economic, social and cultural development could be exercised only in the context of a world order based on democracy, human rights, justice and dialogue among peoples.

59. **Mr. Vidaurre** (Bolivia) said that international conferences on social progress established the global nature and the importance of people-oriented sustainable development. Bolivia implemented fully the conclusions of those conferences, with particular attention to the rights of women, the young, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous populations. Various obstacles, sometimes of a structural nature, nonetheless sometimes prevented the

realization of the ultimate objective which was the eradication of poverty.

60. His Government was endeavouring to improve the standards of living of the population in the near future by applying measures to offer improved employment opportunities and to increase incomes, particularly among the vulnerable groups of society. Development plans ensured equity and equality of opportunities for all in the areas of education, housing, health and basic services.

61. His delegation welcomed the report on the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (A/52/56) and supported the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, particularly the part concerning persons with disabilities. His delegation also supported programmes of demining and of rehabilitation of the victims of landmines, and added its voice to the declarations aimed at the urgent prohibition of those insidious weapons, which created economic and human problems throughout the world.

62. His delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's report on the operational framework for the International Year of Older Persons, 1999 (A/52/328), particularly since Bolivia was implementing structural reforms in the pensions system and other measures in favour of older persons. In that respect, international cooperation and technical assistance as well as the support of international financial institutions for the efforts made by States took on considerable importance.

63. **Ms. Boyko** (Ukraine) said that the internal problems of certain States went beyond national borders, endangering the development of the whole world community. Like many other countries with economies in transition, Ukraine was passing through a difficult period of transformations and nation-building. It was giving priority to improving the situation of the most vulnerable sectors of its population and, in spite of the lack of financial resources, was trying not to cut social programmes. Since the social situation in Ukraine was complicated by the rapid ageing of its population, she supported the measures proposed in the Secretary-General's report (A/52/328) and hoped that the will to improve the situation of older persons would not be limited to the International Year of Older Persons, but would lead to shared efforts in finding a worldwide solution.

64. The lack of financial resources prevented Ukraine from providing the desired level of care for its disabled population, whose numbers had increased as a result of the Chernobyl disaster. She welcomed the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/351) and the final report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission for Social Development (A/52/56, annex). Ukraine had established a strategy based on the principles set out in the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, including a comprehensive programme to solve disability problems, a State programme to develop the orthopaedic industry, and measures to improve the mobility of persons with disabilities.

65. Her delegation attached great importance to the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to Year 2000 and Beyond; it believed that the Programme of Action would enable a universal development strategy to be defined with a view to solving the problems of the young. While the Programme of Action was intended to be implemented at the national level, there should be a mechanism to monitor its realization, and broad international support would certainly facilitate the achievement of its objectives.

66. Constructive and mutually beneficial cooperation by the various bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations system in the field of social development was indispensable. The United Nations should provide countries with technical, consultative and financial support, and assistance in the area of information for the development and implementation of concrete social programmes and projects at the national level.

67. Ukraine strongly believed that reforming various elements of the United Nations system would contribute to improving the effectiveness of the whole Organization, and particularly the objectives outlined by the World Summit for Social Development.

68. **Ms. Al-Awadi** (Kuwait) said that Kuwait's concern for persons with disabilities arose out of its Constitution, according to which social and medical assistance must be provided to older persons, to the sick and to all those who could not earn their living. Those social benefits, supported by the State, entailed the provision not only of material assistance, but also of services connected with health, education and sport.

69. In late 1996, Kuwait had adopted a law on persons with disabilities, showing its increasing concern for that category of persons. The second chapter of that law, which provided for the creation of a High Council for Persons with Disabilities presided over by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, was devoted to the rights of persons with disabilities. That law provided that the State must: care for the disabled either locally or, if necessary, abroad, and take the necessary measures to reduce the causes of disabilities during pregnancy and after childbirth; provide to disabled persons who fulfilled the appropriate conditions housing

adapted to their needs; create rehabilitation centres and homes for the disabled; provide to pregnant women with disabilities an additional month of leave without loss of pay; pay a pension to the disabled who had worked for at least 15 years (10 years for women); apply international standards in respect of persons with disabilities in all public places; provide the disabled with means of transport appropriate to their condition; exempt from import duty all articles imported for use by the disabled; and ensure that at least 2 per cent of public servants were recruited from among persons with disabilities.

70. The Kuwaiti authorities were striving to mitigate the impact that Iraq's occupation of Kuwait had had on disabled persons, who had been subjected to various forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in their defenceless condition. Some had died after having been tortured or deprived of food and medicine, in flagrant violation of human rights and international humanitarian law.

71. After the country's liberation, the Government had had to assume a further responsibility in that connection because of the numerous persons who had been disabled as a result of the war, torture, and the landmines laid by the Iraqi forces occupying Kuwait. Exploding landmines had caused some 2,300 Kuwaiti civilian casualties (7 per cent of them children), including 1,700 killed.

72. The policies and measures adopted by Kuwait in that situation were aimed at eliminating the psychological and social consequences of the above-mentioned inhuman practices and at enabling disabled persons fully to enjoy their rights to life, education, work and medical care, and consequently to become integrated into society.

73. Kuwait's efforts on behalf of disabled persons were based on the various relevant international programmes and plans, including the proposals contained in the Long-term Strategy to Implement the World Plan of Action concerning Disabled Persons to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

74. **Mrs. Pham Thi Thanh Van** (Viet Nam) said that she supported the statement which the representative of Singapore had made on behalf of the ASEAN countries and fully associated herself with it.

75. The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond had formed the basis for numerous projects and programmes at the local, national, regional and international levels in the fields of education, employment, poverty eradication and health care. Many countries as well as United Nations agencies and other intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations were already making preparations for the International Year of Older Persons in 1999. The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, for their part, had received widespread support and had played an important role in improving the status and participation of the disabled in the world.

76. The Vietnamese Government, despite the many difficulties confronting it, was striving to integrate policies concerning vulnerable and disadvantaged groups into its economic and social development policies and to carry out preferential policies aimed at benefiting them. It was also necessary to continue efforts to protect and preserve the nation's identity, traditions and cultural values, including the role of the family as the backbone of society. Her delegation supported the comprehensive measures to strengthen the family, including the role and status of women, that were contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/52/57). In that connection, her Government had placed family development within the common strategy for the socio-economic development of Viet Nam.

77. Older persons made up 10 per cent of the country's population, and had always played an important role in the family and social life of the Vietnamese people. On the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons, held on 1 October, the Vietnamese Aged People Association had joined with the Central Committee of the Youth Union to organize a seminar in Hanoi on old age and interaction between generations. The debate had focused on increased coordination between the Association, the relevant government agencies and mass organizations, and the Government had announced that it had decided to set up a national committee for the International Year of Older Persons in 1999. Preparatory activities for the Year had already begun at both local and national levels throughout the country.

78. Her Government had undertaken numerous policies and measures aimed at helping the disabled persons left behind after years of war and endeavoured to protect their rights.

79. Her Government would take an active part in United Nations activities concerning youth, ageing and disabled persons and would step up its cooperation with other countries and organizations with a view to strengthening the protection of the population groups concerned and promoting their rights.

80. **Mr. Gubarevich** (Belarus) said that his delegation was prepared to participate actively in the preparations for and work of the special session which the General Assembly would devote to an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for

Social Development, thereby undoubtedly giving fresh impetus to that initiative.

81. Belarus was well aware that most social problems would become manageable once the problem of employment was solved. In that connection, he noted with satisfaction that the Commission for Social Development, at its most recent session, had given priority to productive employment, and he was very pleased with the outcome of the discussion and with the contents of the documents that had been approved.

82. Belarus did not share the pessimism of those who regarded unemployment as inevitable and was sparing no effort to achieve full productive employment under conditions of sustainable economic growth. There could be no doubt that, in many countries with economies in transition, employment policy was confronted with high unemployment and rising part-time employment and that those problems were bound to grow as the reform process continued. Moreover, owing to the redistribution of capital, a larger proportion of the population was living below the poverty line. For that reason, Belarus was satisfied with the conclusions adopted by the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fifth session, which had been devoted to the theme "Productive employment and sustainable livelihoods", and was pleased that the Commission had asked the international community to take action to promote investment in countries with economies in transition, having regard to the characteristics of their socio-economic development. Belarus was prepared to believe that those conclusions and other conclusions adopted by consensus would indicate the way forward for all future decisions on the issue.

83. Aware as it was that the task of solving social development problems rested primarily with the countries concerned, Belarus had established a social safety net for all permanent residents, consisting of family allowances and compensation for persons in various categories, such as victims of war, repression or fascism, large families, and persons living in poverty. Assistance was also provided for citizens who were unable to work. With a view to achieving equality between men and women, Belarus had launched a national plan of action aimed at improving the status of women. Mothers with two or more children were given one day off work every week, and Belarus was preparing to amend the Labour Code to provide allowances for working women who had children with disabilities.

84. The key issue in the reform of the national social protection system was, of course, the matter of funding. Whereas in the former Soviet Union all social programmes had been funded exclusively from the State budget, currently, there were special extrabudgetary social insurance and employment insurance funds.

85. Belarus was not in a position to solve all its current problems unaided and consequently considered that United Nations bodies should take the special problems and concerns of countries with economies in transition more fully into account when developing and implementing social policies. It hoped to be able to take advantage of the advisory and expert services provided by the United Nations in the field of the establishment and improvement of national systems for social welfare, job creation, self-employment development for the unemployed and small business development, especially in rural areas.

86. **Mr. Hamida** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the considerable progress achieved by mankind in various fields and the economic development experienced by many regions at the end of the twentieth century had been accompanied by a deterioration in the social situation throughout the world. At the national level, the gap was widening between the rich and the poor, and the situation would continue to deteriorate unless all countries decided to act together and mobilize the necessary financial resources to remedy it.

87. The family was the basic unit of all societies, and its unity was a precondition for social stability. The family brought up children, guided adolescents, and took care of the elderly. The unity of the family must therefore be protected and preserved in order to eliminate all the ills of society (crime, drugs, poverty) and raise the standard of living of all social groups.

88. Because of the increase in the number of elderly persons and the disappearance of extended families in many societies, it was now necessary to find ways to provide social assistance to the elderly, take advantage of their experience and integrate them in social life. The decision which had been taken to proclaim 1999 the International Year of Older Persons was a step in the right direction.

89. It was not surprising that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya was one of the first countries to have drawn attention to the problem of the disabled. The wars which other countries had waged on Libyan territory had left lasting consequences, particularly mines which had been placed over large areas and were continuing to kill and mutilate. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya therefore supported all efforts made to integrate the disabled into society.

90. The deplorable economic and social situation prevailing at the world level affected all social groups, and particularly adolescents (unemployment, drugs, violence),

hence the need to act quickly to put their energies in the service of society.

91. International cooperation for social development must be based on respect for the cultures and values of each society and on mutual respect between States and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, an essential condition for the establishment of peace at the world level.

92. **Mr. Carranza** (Guatemala), said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The report of the Secretary-General on the International Year of the Family (A/52/57) gave the impression that the Year had not had much impact and that efforts would have to be redoubled to achieve its objectives, particularly in the developing countries. As to the Secretariat activities relating to the follow-up to the Year, it was clear that they would be inadequate if they were confined to following up on the provisions relating to the family which had been incorporated into the international declarations and plans of action adopted by recent major world conferences: those provisions only repeated what had already been said and did not add to the substance of the main objectives of the Year. Guatemala therefore felt that United Nations bodies should give Governments more assistance in drawing up policies and programmes for the family, and that the Commission on Social Development should carefully consider the question of follow-up to the Year at its next sessions.

93. The initiatives taken by certain countries to follow up the Year were commendable, but it should not be forgotten that most developing countries and least developed countries did not have the resources to draw up and implement policies and programmes for the family. It was therefore disturbing to note, in the chapter of the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/57) devoted to follow-up activities to the Year at the international level, that only the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) had been active in that sphere.

94. Guatemala urged the international community to make greater contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities, which was too small, and called on the Secretariat to publicize the existence of the Fund so that public bodies and non-governmental organizations of developing countries would know that they could benefit from it.

95. There were many young people in Guatemala; they represented nearly 60 per cent of the population. His Government was applying a multisectoral national youth policy based on the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond; under that policy, youth councils had been established in rural areas.

96. His delegation was gratified that the Portuguese Government had offered to host the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in 1998, which would provide an excellent opportunity to consider the implementation of the World Programme of Action and strengthen it.

97. With regard to education for all, it should be recognized that the progress made was too slow and was encountering ever greater obstacles. In Guatemala, national educational programmes which took into account the plurality of languages and cultures of the rural populations of the country were currently being implemented.

98. **Ms. Lacanlale** (Philippines) said that two years after the World Summit for Social Development, the progress made in eradicating poverty remained uneven. While it was clear that the primary responsibility in that area lay with Governments, a supporting international environment was crucial if they were to achieve success in that endeavour.

99. Her Government, fully cognizant of its responsibility to ensure social development for its population in order to achieve sustained economic growth, was currently implementing a programme of social reform to benefit the disadvantaged, not only to provide a social safety net but also to enable them to earn a living — and young people. Her Government was aware that it would not be able to achieve its objectives alone and needed international cooperation. In that connection, her delegation fully supported the statement made by Singapore on behalf of the member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations and the programmes and initiatives of the United Nations in the area of social development. The Philippines would host the fifth Asia-Pacific conference on social development in November 1997.

100. In the Philippines the disabled, numbering 6.5 million, represented about 10 per cent of the population. Her Government had adopted a national disability policy which strongly emphasized prevention, rehabilitation, and non-discrimination. It was providing for the protection of the basic rights of disabled people on the basis of a separate section in the Philippines human rights plan for the period 1996-2000. In other words, all the necessary institutional mechanisms were in place but much still remained to be done. If the disabled were to be able to live on an equal

footing with the rest of the population, attitudes would have to be changed.

101. With regard to the reports before the Committee, her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (A/52/351) and the report of the Special Rapporteur on monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (A/52/56), since the two reports provided a clear picture of the situation of the disabled in the world and the problems which would need to be addressed in the future. The Philippines noted with satisfaction that Governments were increasingly aware of the problems of that group of the population, but regretted that the same was not true of intergovernmental institutions.

102. In his final report on the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, the Special Rapporteur had pointed out that the rules concerning children were vague. Because of the need to draw more attention to the situation of children with disabilities, the Philippines had sponsored a draft resolution on the subject at the thirty-fifth session of the Commission for Social Development. Her delegation wished to acknowledge the invaluable work done by UNICEF, UNESCO and non-governmental organizations with regard to disabled children. It intended to submit a draft resolution focusing on actions to implement further the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and hoped that the draft would find wide support among the delegations.

103. Since young people accounted for a large proportion of its population, the Philippines had a strong interest in promoting policies in their favour. The National Youth Commission, which was the policy-making and coordinating body for youth-related programmes, was aggressively pursuing programmes on youth entrepreneurship and leadership training, while the Government was in the process of drawing up the Medium-term Youth Development Program for 1999-2004. The Philippines welcomed Portugal's offer to host the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in 1998, which would offer an opportunity to assess the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth. It looked forward to participating actively both in the preparations for the Conference and in the event itself.

104. On the subject of the family, the Philippines supported efforts to incorporate a family-oriented approach into development strategies and endorsed the recommendations contained in paragraph 11 of the Secretary-General's report on the International Year of the Family (A/52/57).

105. Finally, on the subject of ageing, her delegation supported the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report on the strategic measures needed to achieve the broad objectives of the operational framework for the International Year of Older Persons, 1999 (A/52/328). Her delegation wished to inform the Committee that the President of the Philippines had recently signed a proclamation declaring a nationwide observance of the International Year of Older Persons, 1999, and announcing the establishment of a task force to plan national activities to mark the Year.

106. **Mr. Afshari** (Iran) said that the major problem relating to the family was how to defend it from the devastating impact of war, poverty, violence and the disruption caused by constant social change. Given the global nature of that problem, an international approach was required in which all parties would pool their efforts to find appropriate solutions but would recognize that the implementation of appropriate policies was a matter for each Government and each society.

107. As with the family, the problems facing older people and the disabled were global in scale. They were not confined to developing countries and could not be solved simply through schemes, projects and financing but required, rather, a change of outlook. What was needed was work to combat the prevailing indifference to pain and suffering in the world. The exchange of ideas and experience might prove useful in that regard, and there was no shortage of opportunities for international cooperation.

108. On the subject of youth and older persons, his delegation welcomed the adoption of the World Programme for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and decision to observe the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, and it commended the work of UNDP on the question of ageing.

109. Iran's social development policy had been outlined in the summary of its national report contained in the annex to the Secretary-General's report (A/52/305). The data on social indicators, reported by such United Nations agencies as UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA, clearly attested to the Government's commitment to improving the social situation in general and the lot of the disadvantaged in particular.

110. **Mr. Rwubusisi** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that his delegation associated itself with the statements made concerning anti-personnel mines. Recalling that, as a result of the establishment of Rwandan refugee camps in the eastern part of his country, national forestry reserves had been partly destroyed, rural communities had been made

destitute by the decimation of the cow population (500,000 heads) and fields had been destroyed in southern Kivu, he appealed to the international community to fulfil its obligations in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions and help the Democratic Republic of the Congo to recover from the tragic situation which it had recently experienced.

111. **Mr. Al-Humaimidi** (Iraq), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he respected all points of view, so long as they had a basis in fact. Unfortunately, the statement just made by the representative of Kuwait concerning the behaviour of Iraqi forces in his country in 1991 was far from factual. It was not the first time that he had heard those allegations and he intended to reply each time they were repeated. The incubator story, which had been put out by a senior Kuwaiti official in order to turn world opinion against Iraq, had been completely fabricated, as the international press had confirmed.

112. **Ms. Al-Awadi** (Kuwait), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that no man, woman or child had been spared the suffering inflicted on the Kuwaiti population by the Iraqi army during Iraq's seven-month occupation of Kuwait. Both children and adults had been massacred and/or raped in their family's presence and the scale of the tragedy which Kuwait had faced completely belied the statement which the representative of Iraq had just made.

113. **Mr. Langmore** (Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development), summarizing the debate on agenda item 102, said that all delegations had unanimously, forcefully and wisely affirmed the primary importance of social development and agreed on the means to achieving that objective, namely poverty elimination, employment generation and the strengthening of social cohesion. Delegations had described in detail the measures taken by their countries to assist older persons, youth, the disabled and families. Not only was the exchange of information useful, it also encouraged countries to introduce innovations at home that others believed had proved useful and effective elsewhere. Delegations had demonstrated great sensitivity to the issue of gender equality, and it was to be hoped that the same would be the case at forthcoming sessions. He had appreciated the expression of support for the work done by the Division for Social Policy and Development and had noted the strong commendation of the work of the Special Rapporteur on Disability.

114. Delegations had focused more on questions relating to the world social situation, youth, older persons, the disabled and the family and less on the central and broader issue of social development. At future meetings it might be of value to examine the problem as a whole, since evaluating social trends and emerging issues was as vital as considering matters already known to be important. The very positive reaction to comments made to the Committee by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs were an indication of the level of interest in such a debate. The Secretariat would reflect on means of developing that debate in 1998.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.